



FEED MY SHEEP

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The Fruit of Godliness, Part 2

The last issue we published was #134, January, 2010. As regular readers know, I was laid up with a severe back injury until now. I give thanks to God for the healing and to all of you who sent prayers to Him on my behalf. In the January issue, we were teaching about the fruit of the Spirit called godliness. Let me reiterate the final paragraph of that issue for continuity.

Godliness is an attitude of devotion to God. That means that He is the focal point of our life. Everything we think and say and do is to please Him. Remember how we showed that fruit is the outcome of our thoughts, words and actions. It is either good or bad fruit. If then, we have a constant attitude of devotion to God and he is the focal point of all our thoughts, words and actions; then it follows that we will produce good fruit.

To make God the focal point of our life does not mean, however, that one has to have Bible study twice a day and a formal prayer time three times a day. Those are commendable things IF we are doing it with the right attitude. We *should* study the Word, we *should* pray; but the point is not to become oppressed by legalisms such as thinking "I *have* to do this every day in order to be holy and godly."

The important thing in view here is to *have an attitude* of pleasing God every waking minute. This is then borne out in how we treat our neighbor, how we deal with our employers, customers, suppliers, etc. This fruit manifests in how we treat family members, friends, acquaintances...and how we treat our enemies. Paul sums this up succinctly.

1 Corinthians 10:31 Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.

Jesus said His commandments are not burdensome, but are light and easy. All too often Christians become so bogged down in rules and regulations and become so

legalistic that they find the law becomes oppressive and wearisome instead of easy. If this is the case in your life, it is likely because the attitude needs some fine tuning. Are we trying to earn brownie points with God by how diligently we keep the law?

Let's be careful we don't become like the Pharisee in Luke 18 who in his prayer was so proud of himself because he did all the right things according to the law. He really missed the boat, didn't he? He thought that his salvation was based on his performance of the law, and he failed to realize that it is the attitude of the heart with which the Father is most concerned.

A key point of my lectures in sonship bears repeating here. As we grow in our relationship with God, we begin as sinners cut off from God, to sinners saved by the grace of God. Our path is from sinner to servant to son. And here's the key: that a servant obeys his master because he *has* to; whereas a son is obedient to the Father because he wants to. It's all in the attitude, the spirit, it you will.

We said that Godliness is an attitude of devotion to God. Let's explore that further. Our devotion to God would include an attitude of *fear* of God. The Bible speaks of the fear of the Lord in two ways. Which way depends upon our relationship with God. For the unsaved sinner, the fear of God refers to the dreadful terror of the wrath of God which should strike every unsaved person.

It is often this very realization which leads to repentance. A non-Christian comes to realize that he is an imperfect being and as such that there is no way that he can stand in the presence of the Creator. He realizes that in his present condition, he is cut off from God and is completely undeserving of eternal life.

The Bible says that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge. To me, this implies that as a Christian matures in wisdom, that he grows beyond this initial dreadful terror type of fear.

Of course, those who preach hellfire and brimstone are able to conjure up the most heinous and dreadful terrors imaginable which they attribute to the wrath of God. That doctrine is dreadfully wrong, of course. We have explained it in depth in our ten-part series, *It's Hell...or Nothing!* (10 CDs or audiotapes in an album, \$33 ppd.)

But whatever dreadful fear one learns as he comes to faith in Christ, our knowledge of His word leads us to acquire another type of fear of God. It is not the negative side of the fear of pain and punishment, but a mature fear. As Christian believers we are delivered from the wrath of God. Our fear is one of awe-inspired reverence for the majesty and glory and power and holiness of God. So fear of God is a mark of devotion to God.

As we cultivate the fruit of godliness, our attitude of devotion to our Father comes to include more and more a *love* for God. Again, it is a growth process. Whereas our initial love for God might be and usually is based upon our gratitude to him for saving *me* from His wrath, our more mature love is one which realizes more and more of the cosmic scope of God's plan for His creation.

In a more mature love for God, we become less self-focused. Our personal salvation is *wonderful*, and it is only natural that we would be concerned with our own individual eternal destiny first; but unfortunately, some—indeed, many—Christians never grow beyond that stage in their love for God.

In a more mature love, we come to realize the purpose for evil, for disease and deformities, for war and calamities, for hatred and violence, for sickness and suffering, for pain and torture inflicted by man upon man, for every evil imaginable; we come to understand its purpose. (For a much fuller discussion of these several paragraphs, see my book *Sacred Secrets of the Sovereignty of God*, 356 pgs., \$24 ppd.)

Then, instead of blaming it on the devil, we realize the devil is only middle management; he is an agent of God. We not only recognize that God takes the credit for all the evil in the world, but that He planned it from the very beginning for a magnificently awesome purpose. When we truly comprehend that fact, then our gratitude to Him for His mercy and His grace soars to new heights. Our love for Him abounds all the more because He not only saved me but we know that he will ultimately restore all to pristine perfection. (For an in-depth study of this truth, obtain my audio lecture series, *Universal Reconciliation*, 12 CDs or audiotapes in an album, \$39 ppd.)

Therefore, as we cultivate the fruit of godliness, our attitude of devotion to God includes the *fear* and *reverence* of God, and we grow more and more of a *love* for God, and as these grow, it results in an unending *desire* for God. We yearn to know our Father more intimately. We long for His constant presence

via His Holy Spirit.

Our desire for Him displaces our desire for self. This vertical relationship with our Father in such sweet personal intimacy is then reflected and manifested in our horizontal relationship with our fellow man. The virtue of godliness flows out of our character as easily as water from a pitcher.

We have seen now how godliness has both a specific and a general meaning. Generally, it is the sum of the gospel, the totality of the religion of Christ. Specifically, it is piety and reverence toward God marked by an attitude of devotion to God. This dedication of our thoughts, words and deeds towards pleasing God manifests itself in our attitudes and dealings with our fellow man. Let us now read some passages which speak of godliness. Hopefully, our understanding of these passages will now be more illuminated when we come across that word.

1 Timothy 6:1 Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed.

2 And they that have believing masters, let them not despise *them*, because they are brethren; but rather do *them* service, because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit. These things teach and exhort.

3 If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, *even* the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness;

Let's analyze this for a moment. I believe that godliness here is used by Paul in its general meaning referring to the sum of the gospel, the true religion. Let me extract from verse 3 the phrases pertinent to our topic. It would read:

3 If any man ...consent not... to the doctrine which is according to godliness;

In other words, if any man purporting to be a teacher comes along and consents not, that is, shows his disapproval of the doctrines which we have taught you concerning the gospel of Christ, then Paul says.....

4 He is proud, knowing nothing, but dotting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings,

Other translations shed more light on what Paul is aiming at here. He is speaking of those who seem to have a morbid craving and passion for controversy and argument, those who like to show themselves superior by always winning the debate and especially over relatively minor points of doctrine. They are not so much interested in the truth as they are in making themselves look good by winning. (Ever met anybody

like that?) But it takes at least two parties to argue, doesn't it? That is why Paul says in the next verse that it is the ...

5 Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth,

Again, let's pause to remark that anyone who joins in such debates is also of a corrupted mind. Back in verse 4, Paul states that such strife leads to envy and railings. The fruit is envy because the one who loses the argument will despise the other for his supposed superior knowledge of subtle points. And what are railings in this context? To rail at someone is to degenerate to personal attacks, to employ harsh and abusive language towards those with whom the railer disagrees. Paul then gives a specific example of what he is referring to. He says this is the type of person who (as we continue in verse 5) who supposes....

supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself.

6 But godliness with contentment is great gain.

7 For we brought nothing into *this* world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.

8 And having food and raiment let us be therewith content.

9 But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and *into* many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.

10 For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

As we read verses 5 through 10 I am sure many of us could not help but think of the so-called prosperity gospel which is preached in many churches today and certainly it is prominent over the religious airwaves. I would just like to share a few thoughts on that, based on this context.

First of all, let us remember that the context of Paul's exhortation here has to do with master-slave relationships, as we read in verses 1-3. Paul did not come along and attempt to immediately abolish slavery. He knew that it would take a long time. Instead, he encouraged the servant who was a Christian to honor and serve his master all the better, whether the master was a believer or not.

So that when we come down to verse 8 and read Paul's exhortation to be content with food and clothing, we remember he is basically addressing those whose lot in life cannot be readily changed by their own initiative. Paul is *not* making a command here to all Christians of all times. If he were, then it could be construed as to be approving of laziness and sloth. The servant has virtually no choice, so Paul tells him to be content with the food and clothing provided by his

master.

On the other hand, the Christian who is not in bondage to another man has the ability to better himself substantially by applying his God-given talents of intelligence, industriousness and ingenuity in order to better his lot in life. For a man in that situation to just kick back and relax a good portion of his time while he provides the bare necessities for his family when he could with a little effort add substantially more prosperity to his family; he is simply a slothful man.

I am told of a situation where one of my female cousins married a man and they moved up to the northeastern United States. They are perpetually poor because she has always been the breadwinner while he has always been chronically unemployed. It's not that he is lacking in intelligence, apparently; but he is simply too lazy to go out and work. Is it right for him to have the attitude of "Well, we have food and raiment, let us be therewith content."? I don't think Paul would have approved, do you?

But more than recognizing that Paul was primarily addressing the master-servant relationship here, he is also clearly speaking in more general terms of material prosperity and of our attitude towards it. When Paul makes these statements:

that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself.

and

6 But godliness with contentment is great gain.

...are we to assume that Paul is condemning material prosperity as antithetic to the Christian religion? No, not at all. But he is condemning the idea of some that that which helps us along the road to material abundance is therefore the true religion, or the idea that since wealth is good and religion is good, that therefore any mode of obtaining wealth must be approved by religion .

Those with these cock-eyed notions are they who have elevated material prosperity to the level of *the* essential element of religion. And conversely, that anything which does not contribute to material prosperity must therefore be not of the true religion. You could say they confuse God with gold; for while they give lip service to God with their "hallelujahs" and "praise the Lords," their real desire is for material abundance.

Having said that, please understand that I am not making a blanket statement condemning anyone and everyone who has, or has ever, had anything to do with what one would label a "prosperity" preacher. I am simply saying there is a lot of phoniness in Christian circles which is masquerading as the gospel of Christ. I am referring particularly to *SOME* preachers who prey on peoples' idolatry of money, that is, the preachers see the people's love of money, they see the

people's sin, as a means of enriching themselves.

1 Timothy 3:8 Likewise *must* the deacons be grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; [not greedy for money]

Furthermore, as we should all know by now, there is nothing wrong with money and material abundance per se. After all, some of the most prominent saints in the Bible were wealthy: Job, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David and of course, most kingdom believers know the story of Joseph of Arimathea who was one of the richest men in the Roman Empire.

We call Joseph the Tin Man because he owned the tin mines in Cornwall and had the major contracts with the Roman government to supply the tin for the swords and shields of the Roman legions. You could say he was the Lockheed-Martin or the Northrup-Grumman of the day. He was a major defense contractor, so to speak. One of the best books containing the story of Joseph of Arimathea is called *The Drama of the Lost Disciples* (\$21 ppd.)

So there is nothing wrong with material prosperity, nothing wrong with money, as long as it is not your god. But the means to obtain wealth must be in accordance with God's laws. And I point this out because I have studied and read much over the years about PMA, positive mental attitude, and *Think and Grow Rich*, and scores of other self-help books. Without getting into specifics, let me just say that here again I find a wholesale condemnation of such tools as being supposedly un-Christian to be an unfair and inappropriate characterization

Is there not falsehood in them? Absolutely. Can you think of any book other than the Bible that does not have falsehoods in it? I think that some of them, some more than others obviously, are fine expositions in a secular way of some of the hidden truths of Scripture. But, as in any book, we need to be discerning, having our spiritual sense trained to judge right from wrong according to God's laws, but we can utilize many of the principles to improve our lives and our material success. Give God the glory for it is He who gives us the power to get wealth.

So let us not use this passage here in 1 Timothy to justify either extreme: let not the lazy man point to Paul as an excuse for not seeking to provide more for his family. God gave you talents, man; use them and build an estate for your family and for an inheritance for your grandchildren.

Conversely, let not the money-grubber point to Paul where he says it is the LOVE of money which is the root of all evil, while denying this could possibly apply to him. Let each of us examine our own heart and let the Holy Spirit convict us if our first love is money. Even if God runs a close second, repent brother or sister. You shall have no other gods before me, remember?

There is much more that could be taught about the fruit of godliness—the Scriptures are inexhaustible on any subject—but we shall close the subject for now by finishing up this passage in 1 Timothy 6:

11 But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.

12 Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses.

It is my prayer for you whom we teach that this first study of the fruits of the spirit has increased your knowledge of God whereby through His grace you will grow towards spiritual maturity in Christ Jesus.

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